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SIPDIS

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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TAGS: ECON EAGR KFLU YM
SUBJECT: AN ECONOMIC AND FOOD SECURITY ISSUE SHOULD AVIAN
INFLUENZA OCCUR IN YEMEN

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Summary: Even though there are currently no reported cases of Avian Influenza (AI) in Yemen, Ministry of Agriculture (MAI) officials are extremely concerned AI will breakout in Yemen soon. To assist the Republic of Yemen Government (ROYG), the USG has to date: provided US\$8,500 in reagents and antigens to the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL), facilitated assistance from the Department of Defense Naval Medical Research Unit 3 (NAMRU 3) in Cairo, and funded a poultry epidemiologist to assist MAI. Post will continue to monitor and report on the issue. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (U). Even though there are no reported cases of AI in Yemen currently, MAI officials are extremely concerned AI will breakout in Yemen soon. The new Minister of Agriculture, Dr. Galal Ibrahim Fakirah, in meetings with the US Ambassador in early March 2006, listed Avian Influenza as his number one priority for his new administration. Avian Influenza is spreading worldwide at a rapid rate and has been identified nearby in Egypt. With the identification of Avian Influenza in the region, this virus is expected by Government of Yemen officials to reach Yemen soon. Yemen is exposed with over 2000 kilometers of coastline along the Red Sea and Arabian Sea coast. These zones are historical migratory bird flyways between Africa, Europe and Asia with 70 identified put-down locations for migratory birds

¶3. (SBU) At a meeting on March 3, 2006 in Sana'a, both the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and the Head of the Central Veterinary Laboratory stated their fear that the H5N1 virus could already be in Yemen. It was stated at the same meeting that Avian Flu is being viewed by Yemeni officials as an economic issue with food security implications.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON YEMENI ECONOMY

¶4. (U) Yemen is a country of over 20 million people. Beginning in the early 1980's, USAID projects introduced modern poultry production practices into Yemen. Prior to that time, limited imports of frozen poultry and low quality local produced chicken were mainly available. The result has been that by 2006, poultry meat and eggs have become the primary protein source within the Yemeni diet. The impact of the Avian Influenza H5N1 virus on the poultry industry in Yemen would have a severe economic impact and a potential food security problem. Over 65% of the meat consumed in

Yemen is poultry (white meat) according to official sources. It is estimated that 277,778 broilers and 92,593 flats of eggs are produced daily on average for the local market. An average loss from an outbreak of the H5N1 virus to the poultry industry in Yemen would be nearly USD1 million per day.

¶ 15. (U) This loss of food can not be replaced easily by fish, sheep, goat or beef meat. Fish is available in Yemen but primarily in coastal areas and selected large market centers in limited quantity. It is estimated that fish accounts for less than 10% of "meat" consumption in Yemen due to traditional patterns of consumption, limited distribution country wide and a higher cost of USD3.57 per kilogram average. Cattle and small ruminants (sheep and goats) sell for USD6.15 per kilogram average which considered to be high priced and out of the reach of most Yemeni's. Poultry sells on average for less than USD2.00 per kilogram.

GOVERNMENT OF YEMEN RESPONSE

¶ 16. (SBU) In November 2005, an assessment was undertaken by the NAMRU team to determine the capability and capacity for the MAI/CVL in case of an AI outbreak. The capacity for the CVL to accurately test was hindered by lack of proper testing equipment, poorly trained staff and shortage of supplies. A field surveillance system was established by the MAI in January 2006 with approximately twenty five two man teams positioned primarily along the coastal areas. However this number can cover only a small portion of the country and the surveillance teams rely on farmers to bring suspected birds to them. Lack of adequate training of the team members in proper surveillance methods, poor sample handling techniques, inadequate sample storage and lack of any protective clothing for handling of suspect birds are

obstacles to proper identification and containment of an outbreak of AI. Transport of specimens to the only testing facility in Yemen, the CVL in Sana'a, is currently done without any cold storage or proper packing. Most suspected specimens arrive unable to be tested at the CVL.

USG RESPONSE

¶ 17. (U) In November 2005, the NAMRU-3, the US Naval laboratory in Cairo, Egypt sent a team to Yemen at the request of USAID/Yemen to investigate a potential outbreak of the H5N1 virus because the CVL kept getting false negative readings. The results from NAMRU's field findings identified a severe Newcastle outbreak.

¶ 18. (U) The MAI/CVL had not been capable of testing due to lack of materials including reagents or antigens. On February 22, 2006, in response to a request from the MAI, USAID Representative handed over USD8500 worth of reagents and antigens to the Ministry of Agriculture. This supply is expected to last only a month, but it will allow the CVL to begin testing for the presence of the H5N1.

¶ 19. (U) USAID/Yemen is working with the MAI to identify actions needed to be taken and funding sources available. An International Poultry Epidemiologist consultant funded by USAID/Yemen arrived in Yemen on April 18, 2006. The consultant will collaborate with USAID/YEMEN, the USAID funded Yemen Agriculture Support Program and the Ministry of Agriculture to profile and assess the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) surveillance and detection capabilities of the MAI. This includes identifying and prioritizing the needs related to HPAI surveillance and containment and evaluating and synthesizing the existing Government of Yemen Avian Influenza Emergency Plans including agriculture, health, planning, Avian Flu High Committee and other ministries and authorities as required. The consultant will also review the ROYG Emergency Action Chain of Command structure, make policy and training recommendations and conduct workshops and trainings with key stakeholders. The intent will be to produce specific outputs including an AI Action Plan Framework, priority policies

needed for implementation, a draft Action Plan and surveillance needs and laboratory requirements.

¶10. (U) Post's AI Working Group, which includes the USAID/Yemen Health Strategic Objective Team Leader and the Senior Economic and Agricultural Advisor, has developed a Mission Emergency Response Plan and monitors the AI situation in country.

OTHER DONORS RESPONSES

¶11. (U) The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has approved a USD400,000 six country regional project entitled "Emergency assistance for early detection and prevention of Avian Influenza in the Middle East region". Implementation has not yet started and it is expected that funding for the Yemen activity will be limited. A proposal has been developed by MAI but not yet submitted to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for development of a regional veterinary laboratory in the coastal city of Hodeidah. World Bank(WB)/Yemen is assisting the MAI with an activity to assess surveillance capabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) continues to assist the ROYG Ministry of Public Health and Population (MOH) in integrating international guidelines into the National Avian Influenza Preparedness Plan.

COMMENTS

¶12. (SBU) Yemen is not prepared for an outbreak of the Avian Influenza. The Central Veterinary Laboratory, the only facility of its type in Yemen, is not equipped or operating at acceptable world standards to properly identify the H5N1 virus. Surveillance teams are not trained to conduct acceptable field surveillances for disease identification. There are no personal protective clothing units available in Yemen. No containment program is in place with the military, police or any other government authority. Policy is in place with the National Avian Influenza Preparedness Plan but this plan has gaps and is not being implemented appropriately. Compensation, should culling be required, is not being considered as an option. The MAI and MOH have established

Technical AI Working Committees operating under the guidance of the High Committee on Avian Influenza however none of the committees are actively implementing actions regarding AI prevention or preparedness.

KRAJESKI